

N^o 8

*The Influences of the SPIRIT, and
their Uses, consider'd:*

A
S E R M O N,

Preached at the

VISITATION

OF THE

Right Reverend Father in God

GEORGE, Lord Bishop of *Exeter*,

Held at *BARNSTAPLE*,

July the 9th, 1753.

By JOHN ELWORTHY, M. A.

Minister of *Southmoulton, Devon*, and sometime since
Fellow of *Exeter-College, Oxford*.

Published by Desire of his Lordship.

O

EXON: Printed for EDWARD SCORE, Bookseller; and
sold by SAMUEL BIRT, in *London*, JAMES FLETCHER, in
Oxford, and BENJ. MATTHEWS, in *Bath*.

To

G

Lo

D I

F

Is, v



To the Right Reverend Father in God,

G E O R G E,

By Divine Permission

Lord Bishop of *Exeter*,

The following

D I S C O U R S E,

Publish'd in Obedience to

His Lordship's Orders,

Is, with all Humility, inscribed by

H I S L O R D S H I P ' S

most dutiful,

most obedient,

bumble Servant,

J O H N E L W O R T H Y.

THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP OF LONDON

R O R G E

By Letters Patent

of His Majesty

the following

STATUTE

in relation to

His Majesty's Orders

of His Majesty's Privy Council

and His Majesty's

Privy Council

and His Majesty's



I. CORINTH. xii. ii.

But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every Man severally, as he will.

THE whole Chapter from whence the Text is taken is plainly designed to clear up some Doubts, which had been raised by the *Corinthians* relating to that Variety of Spiritual Gifts, which were then common in the Church. Tho' these Doubts in particular are not expressly mentioned, yet 'tis evident enough, that the Nature, End, and Design of the Operations of the Holy Spirit were not by some of these new Converts to Christianity thoroughly considered or understood. As it was a Point of very great Importance, upon the right understanding of which a due Sense of the Religion he was establishing depended, the
Apostle

Apostle fully explains it to the *Corinthians* in this Chapter.

He observes, that the Gifts, which were then so commonly seen among Christians, and which perhaps administered to Pride and Contention among some of those who possessed them, were *divers* indeed in *Kind* and *Degree*. But, divers as they were, they all proceeded from the same Spirit, and were all given to the same End. *The Manifestation of the Spirit was given to every Man to profit withal* *. And he who made not this Use of it slighted his Gift, and, instead of being better, was really much worse, than other Men.

For the better Edification and Instruction of the whole Body of Christians, and for a more eminent Display of the Divine Power in the Institution of their Religion, a Variety of Agents was appointed ; — each endowed with some Proportion or other of these spiritual Gifts. And tho' these either for their Number or Usefulness might seem to give a greater Degree of Dignity and Pre-eminence to some than to others, yet this End was the least intended by them. Every Man had such a Share of them as was most suited to the

* I. Cor. xii. 7.

the Part he was to sustain in the Church, and that *self-same Spirit*, who *worked* or produced them all, *divided all these severally to every Man*, as he in his Wisdom saw most proper and expedient for him.

The Church, or Society of Christians, (adds the Apostle) herein resembles the Body Natural. The several Members of this Body are all useful in their respective Places, and this Arrangement and Disposition of these Members is the Work of God, the wise Author and Contriver of the whole; — who hath allowed no Part to be separated from the rest, without spoiling its Beauty and Perfection, but hath so ordered it, that *whether one Member suffers, all the Members shall suffer with it, and whether one Member rejoyce, all the Members shall rejoyce with it*†. Now ye, Christians, (says St. Paul, in Application of this Similitude) *are the Body of Christ, and Members in particular*||. And that this Body might be rendered beautiful and complete, *God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, thirdly Teachers, after that Miracles, then Gifts of Healing, Helps, Governments, Diversities of Tongues* *. To all these was allotted such a Proportion of spiritual Gifts,

as

† 1. Cor. xii. 26.

|| Ver. 27.

* Ver. 28.

as their respective Stations and Offices required. But it may be affirmed of them all, in the Words of the Text, that they are nothing inherent in the Persons who have them. But they are all the *Work* of *one and the self-same Spirit*, who, to answer the various Exigencies of the Church, more fully and effectually, hath *divided them to every Man severally, as he will*: -- Not in a blind and arbitrary Way, but wisely and rationally, and in such Proportions as are most likely to answer the End intended.

This whole Chapter, then, which we have now under Consideration, evidently supposeth the actual Existence of extraordinary Powers in the Christian Church, when it was first established. What those extraordinary Powers exactly were, any farther than as they are described in the New Testament, it is of no great Importance to us at present to enquire. It may be more proper, in treating upon this Subject, to endeavour to clear the Text from any erroneous Consequence, which may be drawn from it; — and then to consider the Ends, for which these Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit were bestowed upon the first Preachers of the Gospel. This will still more plainly shew the little Reason there is for drawing any such Consequence,

Consequence, and it will be easy to gather from thence how far we ourselves and Christians in all Ages are affected by them.

The Working of the Spirit (as it is expressed in the Text, and some other Places of the New Testament) seems at first Sight to be entirely arbitrary. And they, upon whom it is produced, have been from thence thought little better than mere Machines, whose own Concurrence or Conduct have no Influence at all in the Production of it. *He divideth his Gifts to every Man severally, as he will.*— He continues to do the same now, as well as at the first Dawnings of the Gospel; and therefore 'tis in vain for us to do any Thing of ourselves towards the obtaining any Favour or Assistance from him. Hence have arisen those many groundless Pretensions to supernatural Illumination and Assistance, which every warm Imagination hath so often arrogated to itself. But if in other Parts of Scripture any such Notions are evidently contradicted, then certainly they were never designed to be here advanced by *St. Paul*.

It must be admitted, indeed, that the conferring these extraordinary Gifts in the Times of the Apostles was in some Sense
B
entirely

entirely arbitrary. It was the Work of the Holy Spirit alone, and it depended upon his Will (as the Text observeth) upon whom, and in what Proportions, they should be then conferred. But in this View they are the same, as the different Talents entrusted to Mankind, the several natural Faculties and Powers, which each Man hath received, and which all proceeded from the Gracious and Wise Author of his Being. These Faculties and Powers, tho' freely given him from above, yet when once he received them, are all made subservient to his own Will, and may be used to right or wrong Purposes, as he thinks fit. Equally true is it of these Gifts of the Spirit spoken of in the Text, that they did not hinder the Liberty of Action, nor were they so forced upon any, as to become entirely irresistible. Previous Qualifications were required, even before they were given at all; and we read of none who received the Holy Ghost in any Shape, before they had shewn themselves deserving of this Favour by a sincere Faith in Christ, or by being baptized in his Name. When once they were given, 'tis then the constant Method of St. Paul, wherever he treats of this Subject, to exhort his Followers to make Use of them to
Edification,

*Edification, and Exhortation, and Comfort *.*
— To seek, that they might excel to the Edi-
fication of the Church †.

The 14th Chapter of this Epistle is full of Directions how the *Corinthians*, who were remarkably zealous of Spiritual Gifts, should conduct themselves in this Case. And so far is the Apostle from supposing, that there is any Thing arbitrary, any Thing like depriving Men of the Use of their own Reason or other Faculties in the Exercise of these Gifts, that he particularly lays down the Method, how they should proceed in one very material Part of them, namely Prophecy, or Expounding to the Church. *If a Man could speak only in an unknown Tongue,* he was to be *silent*, unless an *Interpreter* was present. *If any Thing was revealed to another, that sat by, the first that was then speaking, was to hold his Peace.* They were all, in short, to *prophecy one by one, that all might learn, and all be comforted* ||. And that they might not plead an Impossibility as to their Compliance with this Rule upon a Pretence, that the Motions of the Spirit were irresistible, he adds, that the *Spirits of the Prophets were subject to the Prophets* §. For God, from whom these

B 2

and

* I. Cor. xiv. 3. † Ver. 12. || Ver. 27, 31. § Ver. 32.

and all other Powers are derived, confers them all for very wise and good Ends. *He is not the Author of Confusion, but of Peace**.

The Account here given of these Gifts of the Spirit, and of the general Uses for which they were intended, is exactly agreeable to what we elsewhere find upon the same Subject in the other Writings of St. Paul. In his Epistle to the *Ephesians* these Workings of the Spirit, mentioned in the Text, are again taken Notice of with but little Variety of Expression. *Unto every one of us*, says he, *is given Grace according to the Measure of the Gift of Christ*. This Grace so given, whether to *Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, or Teachers*, was purposely designed for the general Good, *for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the Edifying of the Body of Christ †*.

As to the common and ordinary Assistances of the Holy Spirit, which the first Preachers and Converts to the Gospel had in a more eminent Degree, and which Christians in all Ages may expect as far, as they shall want them, the Case is still clearer. It is very certain, that in every Part of the Apostolic Writings Mens joint Endeavours are required

* I. Cor. xiv. 33:

† Ephes. iv. 7, 11, 12.

required to the obtaining of this blessed Aid. They are continually cautioned against *grieving, quenching, or driving* him from them by their Vices. It is expressly declared, that the real *Dwelling of the Spirit* in the Hearts of Men is to be *known* only by the *good Fruits* of Righteousness, *which they bring forth, as a Tree is known by its Fruits*. And it is especially remarkable to our present Purpose, that *God's working in us both to will and to do of his good Pleasure* is given, as a Reason by *St. Paul*, not why Men should do nothing of themselves, but why they should *work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling* *. Every other Passage, therefore, which seems to exclude these essential Qualifications, must be understood in a Sense consistent with them, and was never intended to countenance any Expectations of this Divine Assistance, but upon the Terms therein proposed, or any other Proof of its being actually granted, but those *rational* ones, which the Scriptures themselves describe.

The Text, then, agreeably to this Rule, seems evidently to mean no more than this: — That whatever Powers the Apostles, and first Preachers of the Gospel, received from
above,

* *Philip. ii. 12, 13*

above, they were all given by one and the *self-same Spirit*.— And that this Spirit distributed them in various Ways and Proportions, according as the Exigencies of the Church required, and as he in his Wisdom saw it proper and expedient to entrust the several Agents and Ministers under him with. These Powers indeed were not in Appearance all alike *eminent* or *considerable*. But they might be made all alike *serviceable* to the *grand End*, for which they were given,— namely the promoting the common Cause of Christianity, and edifying the Body of Christ. *For the Manifestation of the Spirit*, says the Apostle a little before the Text, *was given to every Man to profit withal* *. This (it is plain) was the general Design of these Gifts of the Spirit, which (if *St. Paul* himself is to be credited) was best carried on by a Variety of Offices and a Distribution to each of a certain Share of *Grace according to the Measure of the Gift of Christ* †.

Other Ends in particular were likewise served by them, which, in all human Appearance, must have failed without them. What these were, and how eminently serviceable in these Respects, the extraordinary
Assistances

* Ver. 7

† Ephes. iv. 7

Assistances of the Holy Ghost were to the first Founders of our Religion, is the Point next to be considered.

First, They were exceedingly necessary to obviate any Objections, which might be raised to the Novelty of the Doctrines and Facts, with which they were charged, or to remove any Suspicions, which the World might have been apt to entertain, that all this was only a whimsical Invention of their own. The Work, in which they were engaged, was entirely a new one; The Discoveries they were to make directly contrary to the common Notions of Mankind. Great Opposition, therefore, was unavoidably to be expected, and nothing could so effectually prevent it, as a full Demonstration of Almighty Power assisting them in this important Undertaking.

The grand Article, upon which the Whole of what was to be published depended, — A Person raised from the Dead, was so uncommon a Circumstance, that Eye-Witnesses, barely human, of the most unsuspected Character, could hope for but little Credit from the World. But if *they*, who related this Fact, produced even Divine Attestations to the Truth of it, serious and considerate Men would be inclined to believe it upon this Evidence, tho' the Fact itself
was

was really strange, and exceeded the usual Laws of Nature. And if the Evidence be sufficient to reconcile Men to the Belief of this, it will as well secure their Attention to any sober Truths, which they might afterwards disclose to them. In this Manner then were the Apostles enabled to proceed, and it was owing to this, that all their Labours were attended with so great Success. By the Assistance of the Holy Spirit they wrought such Wonders as no one could question the Reality of, and such too as were the clearest Convictions, that the Commission, under which they acted, they received from Heaven. They were the chosen Witnesses of the Resurrection of their Master. But they would have been very insufficient of themselves, if *God also had not born them Witnesses by Signs and Wonders and Gifts of the Holy Ghost* *. This was that *Spirit of Truth*, whom our Saviour promised, before he suffered, and one Part of whose Office, he then said, was, that he *should testify of him* ‡. This is that Evidence, which *St. Peter* produced to the *Jewish Rulers* for the Truth of all, that he and the other Apostles had affirmed. *We are his Witnesses of these Things*, says he, *and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him* †.

This

* *Heb.* ii. 4. § *John* xv. 26. † *Acts* v. 32.

This Gift was conferred upon many of the Christian Converts immediately after Baptism, and a very good End surely was answered by it. They, who, upon the Testimony of the Apostles, supported by the several Instances of Divine Power, which they shewed, embraced the Christian Faith, were thereby confirmed in that Persuasion by feeling the same Effects produced upon themselves. And they, who saw such an Alteration so suddenly wrought in them, had still greater Reasons to be convinced of the Truth of all that they had seen or heard.

And it may be farther observed, that such shining Evidences of the Spirit, as these were, could not fail even in another View of making a deep Impression upon the Gentile World, whithersoever they went. Their own Priests and Lawgivers had constantly pretended to the like Commission from their respective Deities. Full of their Gods they vented their ambiguous Responses, which, carrying with them the Air of Prophecy, could not be thought to be derived from any Fountain less than Divine. And those violent Agitations, into which they sometimes threw themselves, together with some mysterious Sleights, for which the

C

Vulgar

Vulgar could not easily account, possessed their Followers with a strong Persuasion, that *God was with them of a Truth.*

But when the Spirit of God himself began to exert itself, the Fallacy of such Impostors might easily be seen. The *Stewards of his Mysteries*, who is Truth itself, and who were particularly selected to make known his Will and his Ways to the Sons of Men, professed nothing more than what they actually performed. The Events, which they predicted certainly came to pass. The Miracles, they wrought were so plain and sensible, that no Beholder could possibly be imposed on by them. As they reasoned more solidly, wisely, and upon better Principles, than the greatest Philosophers ever known in the World, they gave good Grounds to conclude, that they had received their Wisdom from above: And it fully proved, what our Saviour had before assured them, that *it was not they, that were to speak, but the Holy Ghost **, that should speak by them. The Sight of these Things must naturally lead considerate Men to look back upon the Practices of their own Priests and Professors, and a slight Comparison must convince them of the Excellency of the

* *Mark xiii. 11.*

the One and the vain and idle Pretensions of the other.

But few perhaps would be inclined to consider these Things seriously, and as they ought. Passion, Prejudice, and a Variety of other Causes may contribute towards defeating a Design ever so well calculated for the general Good. And they, who have really nothing else in View but the Benefit of Mankind, may be looked upon with a jealous Eye, and *be rewarded only with Evil for their Good.*

It was therefore farther necessary, that the Apostles, and their immediate Followers and Converts, should be assisted in an extraordinary Manner by the Holy Ghost, that they might be the better able to plead their own Cause, and to bear up with Fortitude and Patience under all the Difficulties and Hardships, to which the Work, in which they were engaged, would unavoidably expose them. No human Strength alone could long have supported them against the united Malice and Cruelty of both *Jews* and *Gentiles*. The bare Wisdom of this World must soon have been silenced, when so solemnly confronted by all the Powers upon Earth. But the Wisdom which they

received from above enabled them to answer every Objection, which might be raised to the Novelty of their Doctrines, and plainly to prove the Truth of all they asserted, how strange soever it might appear. The Aid and Protection of the Spirit of God continually supplied them with as much Patience and Courage as their Circumstances from Time to Time required: And by these Assurances no Power was great enough to terrify them.— No Cunning nor Artifice to confute them. Prepared by the Predictions of their Master they knew, that they were *to be brought before Governors and Kings for his Sake for a Testimony against them.* But all this Treatment was not to dishearten them, nor to render them at all solicitous before-hand, *how or what they should speak: For the Holy Ghost was to teach them in that same Hour, what they were to say.* He would give them a Mouth and Wisdom such, as none of their Adversaries should be able to gainsay or resist *.

And at the same Time, that this Assistance was so necessary upon this Account, it afforded a strong Argument in Favour of all that they asserted. For if, in Defiance of so many Menaces, and destitute themselves

* Luke xii. 11, 12. and xxi, 15.

of all human Protection, they still so strenuously defended the Doctrines they advanced, it might justly raise a Doubt even in their Persecutors themselves, that they were some peculiar Favourites of Heaven, and that the Work about which they were employed was not of Men, but of God.

Lastly These extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost were necessary to inspire the first Preachers of the Gospel with all such Truths as were requisite to perfect the Scheme of the Religion of Christ, and to render it completely serviceable for the Instruction and Information of its Professors in all future Ages. The Conditions of Salvation and future Happiness were first laid in the perfect Obedience of Christ and his Compliance with certain Terms in the Counsels of Heaven before the Foundation of the World concerted and agreed upon. The Earnest, whereby these Advantages were secured to Mankind upon their Repentance and Amendment, was the Resurrection of *Him*, who had thus purchased Redemption for them. And as these Things, together with Directions how they themselves were to behave for the Time to come, were of eternal Concern, it was necessary, that all this should be perpetuated. To this End such
Persons

Persons were made Choice of to be the Publishers of these important Tidings, who had lived and conversed with Christ himself; — Who had received from his own Mouth the several Particulars of this Scheme; — And who alone therefore were best qualified for this Purpose. But that nothing of Importance might be omitted, and that a still greater Weight might be given to their Discoveries, the Assistance of the Spirit of Truth was promised them. He among other Things was to be more especially serviceable to them in *guiding them into all Truth* *. — In *teaching them all Things, and bringing all Things to their Remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said to them* †.

A distinct and satisfactory Account of the doctrinal Part of our Religion was thus effectually provided for. And by the same Assistance were the first Founders of it enabled to lay down such complete Rules of Life and Conduct, as would at all Times *thoroughly perfect the Man of God and furnish him with all good Works* §. They were originally drawn up under the Guidance of that Spirit, who taught them every necessary Truth — Are manifestly consistent with those Notions of Righteousness and Goodness,

* *John* xvi. 13, † *Ch.* xiv. 26. § *II. Tim.* iii. 17.

ness, which the most perfect Reason can discover — And are therefore of themselves sufficient without any farther Addition to answer every Purpose, for which any Scheme of Religion can be calculated.

The several Reasons already assigned for the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit are plainly peculiar to the first Ages of Christianity, and to its first Introduction into the World. — These Reasons and Exigencies have long since ceased, and the Gifts themselves have of Course been discontinued. A Religion, when once founded, wants not the Supports which the laying the Foundation itself requires. Times of Persecution and strenuous Opposition to the Ends of Providence, demand greater Degrees of supernatural Succour and Consolation than Times of more Peace and Security. As this is truly the Case of the Church at present, these extraordinary Supports are now no longer necessary, and therefore it would be unreasonable in us to expect them. But they are still a standing Evidence of the Truth of our Religion, and in that Respect therefore they affect ourselves and Christians in all Ages. The Manner of its first Propagation is faithfully preserved, and we have in some Sense the *Witness of the Spirit* likewise,

wife, since we have the fullest Assurance, that can possibly be had for Events at so great a Distance, that from this Divine Original flowed all those momentous Truths, which have ever since been handed down to us with the exactest Care.— They farther affect us, as thereby the whole Body of Christians may be always edified and instructed. And it is obvious to observe, how much more rational and useful the Scripture Accounts of these Gifts are, than those, which any After-Pretenders to them have given. Even at first, when they actually existed in the Church, they were declared by the Apostle to be entirely useless and insignificant, if they did not tend to mutual Profit and Edification. If they occasioned Confusion and Disorder, If they did not produce the Fruits of Righteousness and good Works, they were entirely thrown away. How much more notoriously would they be misapplied, if it could be supposed, that they were used to quite contrary Purposes;— For the Gratification of peculiar Fancies, to the utter Exclusion of every Thing good and commendable among Men?

In short, If the Spirit of God led the Apostles into all necessary Truths;— If, by
his

his Assistance, they fully made them known to Mankind, then any farther Additions to it in the same extraordinary Way are quite superfluous. If any such could be supposed ever to be wanted, his past Method of Proceeding is enough to satisfy us, that they who should be commissioned by him for this Purpose would have unquestionable Credentials given them of the Authority, by which they were to act. Let any Man produce these, and at the same Time shew, that the End he is serving is equally important with that which the Apostles promoted, and then perhaps he may deserve to be heard. But bare Fancy and Assertion are not enough to satisfy, that the Spirit of God is in any one Man more than another.

Errors of this Kind indeed may easily be prevented by a due Attention to the real Intent and Meaning of those Passages of Scripture, where these Gifts are particularly treated of. Generally speaking they are peculiar to the first Ages of Christianity, and can with no Propriety be applied to the present Times. *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost in general, Receiving the Holy Ghost, — Speaking with Tongues, — Propheying, and the like, — Being led into all Truth, — And having all Things brought to Remembrance,*

D

are

are Promises unquestionably made to the Apostles and their first Converts. If Christians in After-Ages think, that they too are entitled to a Share of the same Promises, this will be only introducing Confusion into the Church, and raising Expectations in themselves and others, which to their great Disappointment will never be answered.

The only short Application, which I shall make of the Whole is this. Mistaking the Operations of the Spirit is always attended with very dangerous Consequences, and the great Source of Enthusiasm in Matters of Religion. It therefore concerns the Preachers of the Gospel more especially to endeavour to keep clear of such Errors themselves, and to beware, lest they are the Occasion of them in others, by misrepresenting or magnifying the Uses for which the Scriptures expressly declare, that these Gifts of the Spirit were intended. Let them not form Pretences to any higher Commission, than the Nature of their Office will reasonably admit of, and then they will not need or expect any larger Helps, than will be really granted. Let them impartially and diligently explain the Doctrines.— Let them fairly produce the Evidences of their Religion, as they stand recorded in the Sacred

cred Oracles of it, without intermixing any Schemes of their own; and then there will be no Danger of misleading the People. If this Care be taken, *the Grace of God will be sufficient for them*, and will happily carry them thro' the Work in which they are engaged. They will then approve themselves useful *Ministers of Christ*, and faithful *Stewards of the Mysteries of God*. They will deservedly derive upon themselves all that Honour and Respect, which their Station can reasonably demand, and will feel within themselves a still higher Satisfaction from the silent Approbation and Applause of their own Minds — A sure Earnest and Forerunner indeed of that *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*, which will at last most certainly crown their Labours, when they are thus prudently engaged, and employed, in that Way, and to those Purposes, to which the Wisdom of Providence itself assigned them.

And as to all Men in general, it is Satisfaction enough to be assured, that the Promise of common Assistance is indeed universal. Every Man, who sincerely endeavours to do his Duty, will certainly have his own Endeavours aided and seconded by the Holy Ghost. But 'tis reasonable to suppose,

that this will ever be done in so secret a Manner, that no visible or external Tokens of it, no sensible Impulse upon the Mind are to be expected. The Effects alone will discover it, and if they are such, as are perfectly agreeable to the strict Rules of Righteousness and Goodness, we are then truly supported by the Spirit of God. By this Test only are the Spirits to be now *tried*, *whether they are of God*, or whether they owe their Original to Superstition or a worse Cause. Other Pretences are groundless and unwarrantable. But the good Man, who is charitable, gentle, meek and temperate, is he alone, who is neither *barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* — Is in the Scripture Phrase really a *Child of God*. — And effectually aided and supported by his blessed Spirit.

F I N I S.

t a
ens
are
dif-
et.
uf-
up-
est
he-
we
orfe
nd
ho
ate,
un-
sus
y a
nd